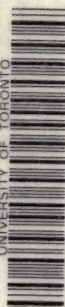


# JIM OF THE HILLS

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



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C. J. DENNIS





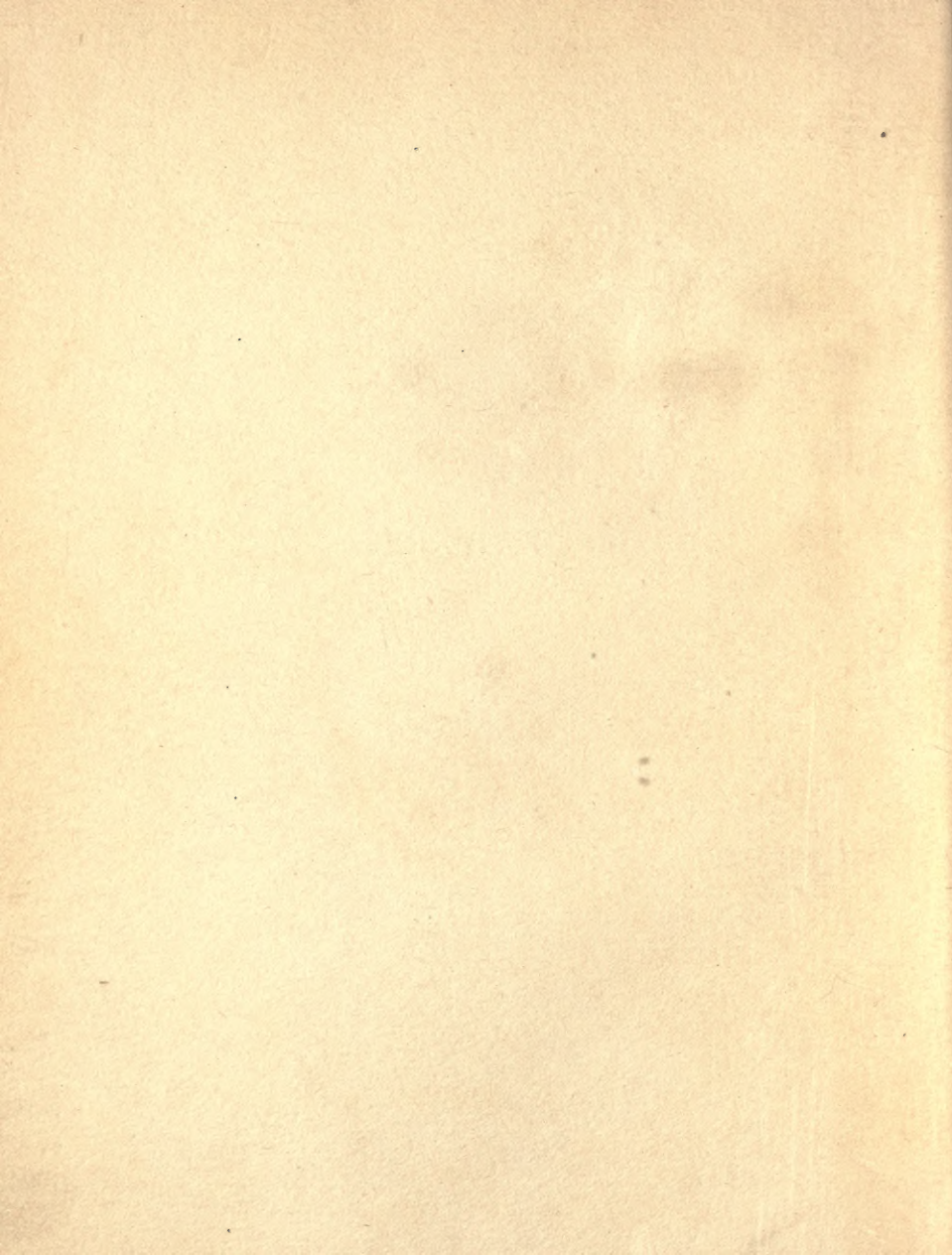








JIM OF THE HILLS









*“ . . . lurchin’ down the crazy wooden ways.”*



# JIM OF THE HILLS

*by C. J. Dennis*



Sydney · Angus & Robertson Ltd





# JIM OF THE HILLS

A STORY IN RHYME

BY

C. J. DENNIS

Author of "The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke," "Doreen," "The Moods of  
Ginger Mick," "The Glugs of Gosh," "Backblock Ballads,"  
"Digger Smith," etc.

*Illustrated by Hal Gye*

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*TO GEORGE ROBERTSON*





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## I. SWINGIN' DOUGLAS





## Swingin' Douglas \*

**T**HERE'S a breeze about the mountain, it is singin' in the trees  
A song to mock the little men who choose to live at ease,  
Or play at toil or pleasure where their fellows crowd and push;  
But put my good axe in my hand and leave me in the bush—  
And it's: Hey, boy!

Hi, boy!

Heave it in the wood!

Oh, the green bush is around us, and the smell of it is good.  
The great bush is before us, and a giant's task to do,  
And hearty men and hefty men alone may see it thro'.  
So it's: Ho, boys!

Hey, boys!

Swing it with a will!

For the saws are howlin' hungry for logs, down at the mill.

The hope for man is honest work, an' out-o'-doors his place,  
The good brown earth beneath him an' the clean breeze in his  
face;  
The work for man is with his hands, his muscles strong as steel,  
When health an' strength within him make him feel as he should  
feel.

\* Douglas—the Bushman's axe, so called after a famous maker.

Oh, it's: Hey, boys!

Shake her up!

Twenty logs to get!

The tail-rope's fouled a saplin' an' the boss is in a sweat.

He's swearin' like a trooper, for they're falling grubby wood;

The boy has broke the whistle-string, which isn't for his good.

But it's: Ho, boys!

Slog along!

Watch her when she goes!

An' ringin' down the gully runs the echo of the blows.

High above us, on the hill-top, where the tall trees rake the sky,

The cockatoos are creaking and the crimson parrots cry.

From below us, where the sawdust by the mill is gleamin' brown,

Comes the dronin' of the twin-saws while the boys are breakin'  
down.

An' it's: Ho, boys!

Let her go!

Watch her, how she sways!

An' the loggin' truck goes lurchin' down the crazy wooden ways,

With the driver at the brake-rope—Oh, that truckie has a nerve!

An' he howls a merry "Hoop-la!" as she swings around a curve.

Then it's: Hey, boys!

Plug ahead!

Feed the greedy mill!

We have fed her logs in dozens, but she's shriekin' for 'em still.



When you test the strength that's in you, oh, it's good to be alive  
In the green bush, the clean bush, an' with your fellows strive . . .  
There's Simon, of the sniggin' gang, in trouble with his log,  
An' he slews her with a cant-hook as she wallows in a bog.  
But it's: Hey, boys!

Steady, boys!

Haul away the slack!

An' the shackled giant's snakin' down the deeply-furrowed track.  
Now the boss he swears to heaven that the timber's all bewitched,  
An' Simon toils like seven men to get the tackle hitched.  
An' it's: Ho, boys!

Right away!

Slew her at the nose!

An' the old winch coughs an' clatters every time the whistle  
blows.

The crowded world may call at times, but here I'd rather be,  
With the strong men, the brown men, who work along with me;  
With the good tan on their faces an' the clear look in their eyes  
That come to men who ply their trade beneath the open skies:  
The rough men,

The straight men,

With coarse words on the tongue,  
An' hearts that work can never break an' minds that must keep  
young.

Oh, it's swingin', swingin' Douglas with a strength you glory in,  
Where willin' hands are honoured hands, an' shirkin' is the sin—  
An' it's: Hi, boys!

Clear, boys!

More to feed the mill!

An' the great tree whistles downward to a crash that shakes the  
hill.

## II. A LONELY MAN





## A Lonely Man

**W**HEN I'm out among the fellows, with the work to hold my  
mind,

Then there's heaps of joy in livin' an' the world seems awful  
kind—

Awful kind an' awful jolly, with no trace of melancholy,  
An' I tell myself the bloke that don't enjoy it must be blind—

When I'm out among the fellows; but, when I am sittin' here,  
Dreamin' by my lonely fireside, then the world gets kind of  
queer.

I suppose it's how you take it: what they call the point of view;  
An' a man don't look for dreamin' when there's work for him  
to do.

But he can't be ever toilin', an' at times he gets to spoilin'  
All the joy the day has brought him—when he lets the black  
thoughts through.

I suppose it's livin' lonely, as a fellow never should;  
For a lonely man gets broodin', an' the broodin' isn't good.

It's never good, the sayin' is, for man to live alone.  
But 'tain't because I like it that I'm batchin' on my own.

For a bloke must take what's goin', an' my life ain't all been  
growin'

Daffodils an' hummin' dance tunes just to give my soul a tone.  
It's muscle that I've had to grow since days when I was small,  
An' all the music that I've made is with the axe an' maul.

When folks are poor an' toil is hard an' times are harder still  
A boy soon learns the use of time if he would eat his fill.

Long before I'd finished schoolin' I had put aside my foolin',  
Till now, at thirty an' a bit, I'm workin' at a mill.

It isn't much; but then my folks knew that my chance was dim,  
Or they might have named me Reginald instead of just plain  
Jim.

Just Jim the Hatter, Lonely Jim, the bloke that don't say much.  
I've heard how people talk of me: the gossippers an' such.

An' they say I'm slow at givin'; but I've got my way of livin',  
An' I've got my bit of farm-land an' a house that ain't a hutch.

An' tho' it hurts if this man sneers or that misunderstands,  
I'm proud to know that all I've got was earned with my two  
hands.

Suppose I don't go gay at times an' throw around the cash:  
It's knowin' want that frightened me from gettin' over rash.

I know I'm keen on savin'; but the pinchin' an' the slavin'  
An' the starvin' in the old days keeps a man from bein' flash.

I never treated neighbours mean or grudged a mate a pound;  
But I ain't out to buy loud cheers by flingin' it around.



An', after all—well, I don't know—it sums up much the same:  
No matter how a man has lived, no matter what his aim—

If it's savin', if it's spendin'—all his life is just a blendin'  
Of the gay days an' the grey days: an' he's got to play the game.  
So where's the use of grumblin' if the game don't suit your  
bent?

I tells myself all this at night—an' yet I ain't content.

There's days that sometimes come to me when toilin's simple  
bliss,

An' every little job becomes a joy I wouldn't miss:

When the labour seems like playin', an' I catch myself a-sayin',  
"Why, it's grand to think a man gets paid for doin' things like  
this!"

But, after, came the lonely night, when I've looked back an'  
said,

"To think I have to slave like that to earn a bit of bread!"

When I'm out among the fellows, oh, the world's a place to prize;  
But here, beside my lonely fire, the glamour of it dies.

Sittin' here I take to gettin' gloomy views of things, an' frettin'  
Till my dog looks up, and wonders, with a question in his eyes.  
He's been my mate for years an' years, an' things that folk  
don't see

Both good an' bad has been thrashed out by my old dog an' me.

Well he knows he's safe for sharin' while I've got a bite an' sup.  
When I'm fit, he's full of frolic, laughin' like a silly pup

Out for fun. But when I'm feelin' sad at night, he just comes  
stealin'

To the fire an' stretches out there with his brown eyes lookin' up,  
Lit with such a queer soft sadness that I feel it isn't fair  
My own private little worries spoils the evenin' for the pair.

Here, to-night, I've sat an' told him—while his tail flopped on the  
floor—

Of particular conditions that have got me feelin' sore.

An' my present little worry is the matter of Ben Murray  
An' his sudden-like attentions to the widow at the store.

I ain't nothin' to the widow, as Ben Murray ought to see;  
But I hear he's talked fight lately, with some reference to me.

I ain't nothin' to the widow—not as yet, at any rate;  
Tho' a bloke can't be dead certain what is like to be his fate.

But I own that I've been thinkin', an' there ain't no use in  
blinkin'

At the fact a man must settle down before it gets too late.

I ain't nothin' to the widow—don't know that I ever will.

Seems to me it's awful reckless takin' lifelong chances—  
still . . .

Me an' my old dog's been talkin' quite a lot—of love an' things:  
Weighin' matters; an' we reckon this here love is full of stings,

Fuller than a stingin' nettle. If a fellow wants to settle  
He needs solid care an' comfort, not the stuff the poet sings.  
Love an' all that talk, we reckon, is a silly sort of fake—  
What's a plain man wantin' further if his wife can wash an'  
bake?

I ain't nothin' to the widow. . . . Neither is Ben Murray though!  
An' he won't find me unwillin' if he wants a little go.

I'm not over-keen on fightin'; but his boastin' an' his skitin'  
Puts my back up; an' his sneerin' often gets down pretty low.

Course, the widow's never mentioned—that's to say, by name,  
outright;

But I know what's gnawin' at him when I hear he's talkin'  
fight.

Talkin' fight an' actin' ugly: not reel earnest, half an' half—  
Shootin' sneers into his smilin', slingin' spite into his chaff.

Tho' a fight I'm never shirkin', when I'm with the fellows,  
workin',

I can give him good as he does, an' just take it with a laugh.

But at evenin' when I'm broodin', I chew over all the lot,  
Till his jokes swell into insults an' his hintin' makes me hot.

He can have it—if he wants it! He won't be too long denied!  
But I've heard he's mentioned fivers—wants to fight five pounds  
a side.

If I'm licked, of course, I lose it; an' that fool will go an'  
booze it:

Throw it clean into the gutter with the other cash he's shied.

I been told to-day he's sayin' that his fiver saves his skin. . . .

Wonder what he meant, the blighter, that should make the fellows grin. . . .

Jumpin' Moses! . . . *He can have it!* Anywhere an' anywhen! Fivers? Let him talk of fivers! Holy wars, I'll make it ten!

He'll get fightin', too, in plenty. If he likes I'll make it twenty! We shall see whose skin is safest an' whose hide is toughest then.

I ain't got no grudge against him—only what the rotter's said.

I ain't nothin' to the widow! . . . Here, old dog, we'll get to bed.



### III. A MORNING SONG



## A Morning Song

THE thrush is in the wattle tree, an', "O, you pretty dear!"  
He's callin' to his little wife for all the bush to hear.

He's wantin' all the bush to know about his charmin' hen;

He sings it over fifty times, an' then begins again.

For it's Mornin'! Mornin'! The world is wet with dew,  
With tiny drops a-twinkle where the sun comes shinin' thro'.

The thrush is in the wattle tree, red robin's underneath,  
The little blue-cap's dodgin' in an' out amongst the heath;

An' they're singin', boy, they're singin' like they'd bust  
'emselves to bits;

While, up above, old Laughin' Jack is havin' forty fits.

For it's Mornin'! Mornin'! The leaves are all ashine:  
There's treasure all about the place; an' all of it is mine.

Oh, it's good to be a wealthy man, it's grand to be a king  
With mornin' on the forest-land an' joy in everything.

It's fine to be a healthy man with healthy work to do

In the singin' land, the clean land, washed again with dew.

When sunlight slants across the trees, an' birds begin to sing,  
Then kings may snore in palaces, but I'm awake—and king.

But the king must cook his breakfast, an' the king must sweep  
the floor;

Then out with axe on shoulder to his kingdom at the door,

His old dog sportin' on ahead, his troubles all behind,  
An' joy mixed in the blood of him because the world is kind.  
For it's Mornin'! Mornin'! Time to out an' strive!  
Oh, there's not a thing I'm askin' else but just to be alive!

It's cranky moods a man will get an' funny ways of mind;  
For I've a memory of one whose thoughts were all unkind:  
Who sat an' brooded thro' the night beside the blazin' log,  
His home a mirthless, silent house, his only pal a dog.  
But it's Mornin'! Mornin'! I nurse no thought but praise,  
I've more good friends than I could count, tho' I should count for  
days.

My friends are in the underbrush, my friends are in the trees,  
An' merrily they welcome me with mornin' melodies.  
Above, below, from bush an' bough each calls his tuneful part;  
An' best of all, one trusty friend is callin' in my heart.  
For it's Mornin'! Mornin'! When night's black troubles end.  
An' never man was friendless yet who stayed his own good  
friend.

Ben Murray, he's no friend of mine, an' well I know the same;  
But why should I be thinkin' hate, an' nursin' thoughts of blame?  
Last evenin' I'd no friend within, but troubles all around,  
An' madly thought to fight a man for ten or twenty pound.  
But it's Mornin'! Mornin'! my friend within's alive,  
An' he'd never risk a twenty—tho' he might consider five.



But where's the call to think of strife with such good things  
about?

The gum-leaves are a-twinkle as the sun comes peepin' out.

The blue-cap's in an' out the fern, red robin's on the gate,

An' who could hear the song of them and hold a thought of  
hate?

Oh, it's Mornin'! Mornin'! No time for thinkin' wrong.

An' I'd be scared to strike a man, I feel so awful strong.

Grey thrush is in the wattle, an' it's, "O, you pretty dear!"

He's callin' to his little wife, an' don't care who should hear

In the great bush, the fresh bush, washed again with dew.

An' my axe is on my shoulder, an' there's work ahead to do.

Oh, it's Mornin'! Singin' Mornin'! in the land I count the best,

An' with the heart an' mind of me I'm singin' with the rest.



#### IV. A FREAK OF SPRING





## A Freak of Spring

A T any other time of year  
It might have passed, but Spring is queer.  
He says somethin'—I dunno—  
Somethin' nasty. I says, "Ho!"  
"Ho, yourself!" he says, an' glares.  
I says nothin'—only stares.  
"Coot!" says he . . . Then up she goes!  
An' I land him on the nose.

*It was Spring, Spring, Spring! Just to hear the thrushes sing  
Would make a fellow laugh, or love, or fight like anything.*

*Which mood called I wasn't carin'; I was feelin' fine an' darin';  
So I fetches him a beauty with a lovely left-arm swing.*

*Ben Murray staggered back a bit an' howled a wicked word  
Which gave me feelin's of great joy . . . An' that's how it  
occurred.*

"On the sawdust!" yells old Pike,  
Gloatin' an' bloodthirsty-like.

"On the sawdust with yeh both!"

Truth to tell, I'm nothin' loth.

I peel off my coat an' vest.

Murray, with his rage suppressed,

Comes up eager, pale with spite.

"Glory!" shouts old Pike. "A fight!"

*It was Spring, glad Spring, an' the swallows on the wing  
Made a man feel kind an' peaceful with their cheery twittering.*

*As I watched their graceful wheelin' with a pleasant sort  
of feelin'*

*Old man Pike pulled out his ticker, an' the mill-hands made a  
ring.*

*There was gold upon the wattle an' the blackwood was in bud,  
An' I felt the call for action fairly sizzin' in my blood.*

Murray comes on like a bull;

Both his eyes with spleen are full.

Let him have it—left an' right. . . .

Pike is bustin' with delight. . . .

Right eye once and left eye twice—

Then he grabs me like a vise. . . .

Down into the dust we go—

Bull-dog grip and short-arm blow.

*It was Spring! Mad Spring! Just to feel him clutch an' cling  
Told me plain that life was splendid an' my strength a precious  
thing.*

*On the sawdust heap we scrambled, while the fellows yelled  
an' gambled*

*On the fight; an' Ben loosed curse-words in a never-endin' string.*

*Oh, I glimpsed the soft sky shinin' an' I smelled the fresh-cut  
wood;*

*An' as we rolled I pummelled him, an' knew the world was  
good.*

"'Tain't a dog-fight!" shouts Bob Blair.

"Stand up straight an' fight it fair."

I get end-up with a grin.

"Time!" yells Pike, an' bangs a tin.

"Corners, boys. A minute's spell."

"Good lad, Jim! You're doin' well,"

Says the little Dusty, Dick. . . .

Murray's eye is closin' quick.

*It was Spring, sweet Spring, an' a man must have his fling:*

*Healthy men must be respondin' to the moods the seasons bring.*

*That sweet air, with scrub scents laden, all my body was  
    invadin',*

*Till each breath I drew within me made me feel I was a king.*

*'Twas the season to be doin'—fondlin' maids, or fightin' men—*

*An' I felt my spirit yearnin' for another crack at Ben.*

Pike bangs on his tin again.

"Time!" he roars. "Get to it, men!"

I come eager, fit to dance;

Ben spars cautious for a chance.

With a laugh I flick him light;

Then—like lightnin' comes his right

Full an' fair upon the jaw—

Lord, the purple stars I saw!

*It was Spring, wild Spring! When I felt the sudden sting  
Of a clout all unexpected, I was just a maddened thing—*

*Just a savage male thing ragin'; battle all my wits engagin'.  
Instant I was up an' at him, an' I punched him round the ring.  
I forgot the scents an' season; I lost count of time an' place;  
An' my only aim an' object was to batter Murray's face.*

Pike is dancin' wild with joy;  
Dusty Dick howls, "At him, boy!"

I am at him, fast an' hard.  
Then, as Murray drops his guard,  
I get in one, strong an' straight,  
Full of enmity an' weight.

Down he goes; the fellows shout.  
"One!" starts Pike, then . . . "Ten—an' out!"

*It was Spring, gay Spring. Still were swallows on the wing,  
An', on a sudden, once again I heard the thrushes sing.*

*There was gold upon the wattle, an' my recent wish to throttle  
Murray, as he lay there groanin', was a far-forgotten thing.*

*In the soft blue sky were sailin' little clouds as fine as fluff.  
"Wantin' more?" I asked him gently; but Ben Murray said,  
"Enough."*

"Well done, Jim," says old Bob Blair.  
"'Tis the brave deserves the fair."



An' he laughs an' winks at Pike  
In a way that I don't like.  
"Widders," grins young Dusty Dick,  
"Likes a bloke whose hands is quick.  
Now poor Ben can take the sack."  
But I frowns, an' turns my back.

*It was Spring, the fickle Spring; an' a most amazin' thing  
Came upon me sudden-like an' set me marvelling.*

*For no longer was I lookin' for a wife to do my cookin',  
But for somethin' sweet an' tender of the kind that kiss an' cling.  
Oh, for such a one I'd battle, an' I'd win by hook or crook;  
But it did seem sort of foolish to go fightin' for a cook.*

Standin' on the sawdust heap  
I feel mean an' rather cheap,  
Widows? Let the widow go!  
What we fought for I don't know.  
Murray offers me his hand:  
"Jim, you've won; so, understand,  
I don't mean to block your road . . ."  
But I answer, "That be blowed!"

*"Why, it's Spring, man, Spring!" (An' I gave his fist a wring)  
"If you reckoned me your rival, give up thinkin' such a thing.  
I just fought for fun an' frolic, so don't you get melancholic;  
An', if you have notions yonder, why, buck up an' buy the ring!"*

*Put some beefsteak on your eye, lad, an' learn how to keep  
your guard."*

*Then I put my coat an' vest on, an' walked homeward . . .  
thinkin' hard.*

## V. THE VISION



## The Vision

OF things that roam about the bush I ain't got many fears,  
For I knows their ways an' habits, an' I've chummed with  
them for years.

For man or beast or gully ghost I've pluck enough to spare;  
But I draws the line at visions with the sunlight in their hair.

When a man has fought an' conquered it is good in many ways:  
There's the pride in havin' done it, an' the other fellows' praise;  
There's the glory an' the standin' that you get among the men—  
All their looks are more respectful since I socked it into Ben.

I was feelin' fine this mornin' when I started out to work;  
An' I caught myself high-steppin' with a boastful sort of jerk;  
With my head a trifle higher an' my eye a little stern.  
I thought the world was mine for keeps; but I'd a lot to learn.

Young Dick, the Dusty, wasn't half so cheeky as of old;  
The men were actin' friendly-like, but I kept kind of cold  
An' distant, as becomes a bloke who's scored a knock-out  
thump—  
Till just approachin' dinner time; an' then I got my bump.



It's fine to see your cobbers lookin' at you like they know  
You're not a man to trifle with; at least, I found it so.

Ben Murray was quite affable, an' once he whispered me  
There's a certain somethin' doin', an' he'll see me privately.

I was workin' at the rip saw; for the boss had called me in,  
From the peaceful bush an' quiet to the sawmill's fuss an' din;  
An' there he put me tailin' out—a game I never like;  
But, "Likin' isn't gettin' in the bush," says Daddy Pike.

I was workin' at the rip saw, cursin' at my achin' back,  
When I saw the blessed vision comin' down the log-yard track.  
There were others in the party, but the one that got my stare  
Was her with two brown, laughin' eyes an' sunlight in her hair.

"More visitors!" growled old man Pike. "Another city push.  
I'll bet a quid they ask us why we 'spoil the lovely bush.'"  
I hardly heard him saying it, for like a fool I stand,  
My eyes full of the vision an' a batten in my hand.

"You gone to sleep?" the sawyer said. "What's got you  
mesmerized?"  
I start to work like fury, but my thoughts can't be disguised.  
"Oh, Jim's gone dippy with the Spring"; replies old Pike an'  
grins.  
I turn to answer dignified; but trip, an' bark my shins.

Next thing I know the boss is there, an' talkin' fine an' good,  
Explainin' to the visitors how trees are made of wood.

They murmur things like "Marvellous!" an' "What a monster  
tree!"

An' then the one with sunlit hair comes right bang up to me.

"I saw you fall," she sort of sung: you couldn't say she talked,  
For her voice had springtime in it, like the way she looked an'  
walked.

"I saw you fall," she sung at me. "I hope you were not hurt."  
An' suddenly I was aware I wore my oldest shirt.

"It never hurt me half as much as your two smilin' eyes."  
That's how I could have answered her—an' watched old Pike's  
surprise—

"It never harmed me half as much as standin' here like this  
With tattered shirt an' grimy hands" . . . But I just says,  
"No, Miss."

"Oh, no," I says. "We're pretty hard, an' have to take them  
cracks."

(But, just to see her sudden smile, made me as soft as wax.)

"You're strong," she smiles. I answers, "Oh, I'm pretty strong,  
all right."

An' close behind I heard old Pike observin', "Hear 'im skite!"

That finished me. I lost what little nerve I had, an' grew  
Dead certain that I looked a fool, an' that she thought so, too.

She talked some more; but I can't tell what other things she  
said.

I went all cold, except my ears, an' they were burnin' red.

I only know her eyes were soft, her voice was kind an' low.  
I never spoke another word exceptin' "Yes" an' "No."

I never felt a bigger chump in all my livin' days,  
Well knowin' I was gettin' worse at every word she says.

An' when she went off with the rest I stood there, lookin' sick,  
Until I caught a chance remark of little Dusty Dick.

"What price the widders now?" says he. I answer fierce an'  
low:

"Were you addressin' me?" I says; an' Dick was prompt with  
"No!"

I don't know how I finished up; my thoughts were far from  
clear;

For, in between me an' the bench, that vision would appear.

No other man chucked off at me, but by their looks 'twas plain  
I'd lost a bit of that respect it took a fight to gain.

An', when the knock-off whistle blew, Ben Murray he came by,  
An' says he'd like that private talk, but, "Pickle it," says I.

"'Twill have to keep till later on." He answers, "As you like."

Soon after that I saw him talkin' earnest with old Pike.

If I'd been right, I might have known there's somethin' in the air  
By the way the blokes were actin'; but a fat lot did I care.

Swell visions an' the deadly pip was what was wrong with me.

I slung a word to my old dog, an' we trudged home to tea.

An' after, in the same old way, we sits beside the fire,  
To have a talk, my dog an' me, on fools an' vain desire.

I tell him I'm a silly chump to think the things I do.

An', with a waggle of his tail, he says he thinks so too.

I tell him I suppose she's rich, or so she seems to be;

Most likely some reel city swell—an' he don't disagree.

I says to him the chances are I'll not see her no more.

Then he gives me a funny look, an' curls up on the floor.

But I was slow to take the tip, an' went on talkin' rot

About injustice in the world, an' boiled up good an' hot.

I spouts of wrongs of workin' men an' how our rulers fail.

His eyes are shut, but he just seconds motions with his tail.

All beauty's only for the rich, all times, an' every way.

The toilers just take what is left, as I've heard Murray say

When he's been talkin' to the boys about the workers' rights,  
An' spoutin' of equality, down at the huts, of nights.

I turned the social system inside-out for my old dog,  
Tho' he don't seem much entertained, but lies there like a log.  
I spoke of common people's wrongs—especially of mine;  
But when I came to mention love I thought I heard him whine.

But I went on, an' said straight out that, tho' I seemed above  
Such nonsense once, I'd changed a bit, an' I *believed* in love.

I said love was a splendid thing! . . . Then, true as I am  
born,

He rose, an' yawned, an' shut me up with one crook glance  
of scorn.

It's bad enough to be a bloke without one reel close friend;  
But when your dog gives you the bird it's pretty near the end.

Ashamed, I sneaked away to bunk; an' fell to dreamin' there  
Of a little brown-eyed vision with the sunlight in her hair.



## VI. OLD BOB BLAIR



## Old Bob Blair

I GOT so down to it last night,  
With longin' for what could not be,  
That nothin' in the world seemed right—  
Or everything was wrong with me.  
My house was just a lonely hole,  
An' I had blisters on my soul.

Top of my other worries now  
The boys are talkin' strike, an' say  
If we put up a sudden row  
We're sure of forcin' up our pay.  
I'm right enough with what I get;  
But some wants more, an' then more yet.

Ben Murray's put it up to me:  
He says I got some influence  
Amongst them, and if I agree—  
"Which I will do if I have sense"—  
We'll make the boss cough up a bit.  
That's how Ben Murray looks at it.

## JIM OF THE HILLS

I don't know that the old boss can.

I've heard he's pushed to make ends meet.  
To me he's been a fair, straight man  
That pays up well an' works a treat.  
But if I don't get in this game,  
Well, "blackleg" ain't a pretty name.

This thing has got me thnkin' hard,  
But there is worse upon my mind.  
What sort of luck has broke my guard  
That I should be the man to find  
A girl like that? . . . The whole world's wrong!  
Why was I born to live and long?

I get so down to it last night,  
With broodin' over things like this,  
I said "There's not a thing in sight  
Worth havin' but I seem to miss."  
So I go out to get some air  
An' have a word with old Bob Blair.

Bob's livin' lonely, same as me;  
But he don't take to frettin' so  
An' gettin' megrims after tea.  
He reads a lot at night, I know;  
His hut has books half up the wall  
That I don't tumble to at all.

Books all about them ancient blokes  
That lived a thousand years ago:  
Philosophers an' funny folks.

What he sees in them I don't know.  
There ain't much fun, when all is said,  
In chaps that is so awful dead.

He put his book down when I came,  
He took his specs off, patient-like.  
He's been in Rome; an' who can blame  
The old man if he gets the spike  
To be jerked back so suddenly  
By some glum-lookin' coot like me.

At first he looks at me quite dazed,  
As tho' 'twas hard to recognize  
The silly fool at which he gazed;  
An' then a smile come in his eyes:  
"Why, Jim," he says. "Still feelin' blue?  
Kiss her, an' laugh!" . . . But I says, "Who?"

"Why, who, if not the widow, lad?"  
But I says, "Widows ain't no go."  
"What woman, then, makes you so sad?"  
I coughs a bit an' says, "Dunno."  
He looked at me, then old Bob Blair  
He ran his fingers through his hair.



## JIM OF THE HILLS

"God help us, but the case is bad!  
An' men below, an' saints above  
Look with mixed feelin's, sour an' sad,  
Upon a fool in love with love.  
Go, find her, lad, an' be again,  
Fit to associate with men.

"Don't leave yourself upon the shelf:  
It's bad for man to live alone."  
"Hold on," says I. "What ails yourself?  
What are *you* doin' on your own?"  
Quickly he turned away his head.  
"That's neither here nor there," he said.

I saw I'd made a clumsy break;  
An' tried to cover it with talk  
Of anything, for old Blair's sake.  
He don't reply; but when I'd walk  
Outside he says, "What's this I hear  
About the mill boys actin' queer?"

So then we yarns about the strike,  
An' old Bob frowns an' shakes his head.  
"There's something there I hardly like;  
The boss has acted fair," he said.  
"Eight years I've toiled here constantly,  
An' boss an' friend he's been to me.

"I know he's up against it bad;  
 Stintin' himself to pay the men.  
 Don't listen to this tattle, lad,  
 An' leave that dirty work to Ben.  
 He tries to play on others need;  
 It's partly devil, partly greed.

"Ben's not a reel bad lot at heart,  
 But ignorant an' dull of sight,  
 An' crazed by these new creeds that start  
 An' grow like mushrooms, overnight;  
 An' this strange greed that's spread the more  
 Since the great sacrifice of war.

"Greed everywhere!" sighed old man Blair.  
 "Master an' man have caught the craze;  
 An' those who yesterday would share  
 Like brothers, now spend all their days  
 Snatchin' for gain—the great, the small.  
 And, oh, the folly of it all!"

He tapped the small book by his hand.

"Two thousand years ago they knew  
 That those who think an' understand  
 Can make their wants but very few.  
 Two thousand years ago they taught  
 That happiness can not be bought."

## JIM OF THE HILLS

"Progress?" he shouted. "Bah! A fig!  
Where are the things that count or last  
In building something very big  
Or goin' somewhere very fast?  
We put the horse behind the cart;  
For where's your progress of the heart?"

"Great wisdom lived long years ago,  
An' yet we say that we progress.  
The paint an' tinsel of our show  
Are more than at the old address.  
Are men more generous, or kind?  
Then where's your progress of the mind?"

(I think Bob Blair's a trifle mad;  
They say so, too, around these parts;  
An' he can be, when he's reel bad,  
A holy terror once he starts.  
Dare say it's readin' books an' such.  
Thank God I never read too much!)

I says I'm sure that I don't know  
Where all this progress gets to now.  
He smiles a bit an' answers low,  
"Maybe you'll find out, lad, somehow.  
But talkin' makes my old head whirl;  
So you be off, an'—find that girl."

I says Good night, an' out I goes;  
 But I was hardly at the door  
 When his old specs is on his nose,  
 An' his book in his hand once more;  
 An', as I take the track for home,  
 Bob Blair goes back to Ancient Rome.





## VII. THE WOOER



## The Wooer

I NEARLY fell fair in my tracks.  
I'm trudgin' homeward with my axe  
When I come on her suddenly.

"I wonder if I'm lost?" says she.  
"It's risky on such roads as this."  
I lifts my hat an' says, "Yes, miss."  
I knew 'twas rude for me to stare,  
But, oh, that sunlight in her hair!

"I wonder if I'm lost?" says she,  
An' gives a smile that staggers me.  
"An' yet, it wouldn't matter much  
Supposing that I was, with such  
A glorious green world about,  
With bits of blue sky peepin' out.  
Do *you* think there will be a fog?"  
"No, miss," says I, an' pats my dog.

"Oh, what a dear old dog!" says she.  
"Most dogs are pretty fond of me."  
She calls him to her, an' he goes.  
(He didn't find it hard, I s'pose;

## JIM OF THE HILLS

I know I wouldn't, if she called.)  
"It's wondrous how the tracks are walled  
With these great trees that touch the sky  
On either side." "Yes, miss," says I.

She fondles my old dog a bit;  
I wait to make a bolt for it.  
(There ain't no call to stand an' talk  
With one who'd be too proud to walk  
A half-a-yard with such as me.)  
"The wind seems workin' up," says she.  
"Yes, miss," I says, an' lifts me hat.  
An' she just lets it go at that.

She lets me reach the dribblin' ford—  
That day to me it fairly roared.  
(At least, that's how the thing appears;  
But blood was poundin' in my ears.)  
She waits till I have fairly crossed:  
"I thought I told you I was lost?"  
She cries. "An' you go walkin' off,  
Quite scornful, like some proud bush toff!"

She got me thinkin' hard with that.  
"Yes, miss," I says, an' lifts my hat.  
But she just waits there on the track,  
An' lets me walk the whole way back.

"An' are you reely lost?" says I.

"Yes, sir," says she, an' drops her eye. . . .

I wait, an' wait for what seems days;

But not another word she says.

I pats my dog, an' lifts my hat;

But she don't seem to notice that.

I looks up trees an' stares at logs,

An' long for twenty hats an' dogs.

"The weather's kept reel good to-day,"

I blurts at last. Says she, "Hurray!"

"Hurray!" she says, an' then, "Encore!"

An' gets me wonderin' what for.

"Is this the right road to 'The Height?'"

I tell her it's the road, all right,

But that the way she's walkin' ain't.

At that she looked like she would faint.

"Then I *was* lost if I had gone

Along this road an' walked right on—

An unfrequented bush track, too!

How fortunate that I met you!"

"Yes, miss," I says. "Yes—what?" says she.

Says I, "Most fortunate . . . for me."

I don't know where I found the pluck

To blurt that out an' chance my luck.

## JIM OF THE HILLS

"You'll walk," she says, "a short way back,  
So you can put me on the track?"

"I'll take you *all* the way," says I,  
An' looks her fair bang in the eye.

Later, I let myself right out,  
An' talked; an' told her all about  
The things I've done, an' what I do,  
An' nearly all I'm hopin' to.

Told why I chose the game I'm at  
Because my folks were poor, an' that.

She seemed reel pleased to hear me talk,  
An' sort of steadied up the walk.

An' when I'd spoke my little bit,  
She just takes up the thread of it;  
An' later on, near knocks me down  
By tellin' me she *works*—in town.

Works? Her? I thought, the way she dressed,  
She was quite rich; but she confessed  
That makin' dresses was her game,  
An' she was dead sick of the same.

When Good bye came, I lifts my hat;  
But she holds out her hand at that.

I looked at mine, all stained with sap,  
An' told her I'm a reel rough chap.



"A worker's hand," says she, reel fine,  
"An' marked with toil; but so is mine.  
We're just two toilers; let us shake,  
An' be good friends—for labour's sake."

I didn't dare to say no more,  
For fear of what she'd take me for—  
But just Good bye, an' turns away,  
Bustin' with things I had to say.  
I don't know how I got right home.  
The wonder was I didn't roam  
Off in the scrub, an' dream on there  
Of her with sunlight in her hair.

At home I looks around the place,  
An' sees the dirt's a fair disgrace;  
So takes an' tidies up a bit,  
An' has a shave; an' then I sit  
Beside my fire to have a think.  
But my old dog won't sleep a wink;  
He fools, an' whines, an' nudges me,  
Then all at once I thinks of tea.

I beg his pardon with a smile,  
An', talkin' to him all the while,  
I get it ready, tellin' him  
About that girl; but, "Shut up, Jim!"

## JIM OF THE HILLS

He says to me as plain as plain.  
"First have some food, an' then explain."  
    (I don't know how she came to tell,  
    But I found out her name is Nell.)

We gets our bit to eat at last.  
(An', just for spite, he et his fast) . . .  
    I think that Nell's a reel nice name . . .  
    "All right, old dog, I ain't to blame  
If you" . . . Just as I go to sup  
My tea I stop dead, with my cup  
    Half up, an' . . . By the Holy Frost!  
    I wonder was Nell reely lost?

## VIII. RED ROBIN



## Red Robin

**H**I, it's a funny world! This mornin' when I woke  
I saw red robin on the fence, an' heard the words he spoke.  
Red robin, he's a perky chap, an' this was his refrain:  
"Dear, it's a pity that poor Jenny is so plain."

To talk like that about his wife! It had me scandalized.  
I'd heard him singin' so before, but never recognized  
The meaning of his chatter, or that he could be so vain:  
"Dear, it's a pity that poor Jenny is so plain."

I don't know how, I don't know why, but this reminded me  
I was promised to the widow for this Sunday night to tea.  
I'd promised her for weeks an' weeks, until she pinned me  
down.  
I recollects this is the day, an' gets up with a frown.

I was thinkin' of the widow while I gets me clobber on—  
Like a feller will start thinkin' of the times that's past an' gone.  
An', while my thoughts is runnin' so, that bird chips in again:  
"Dear, it's a pity that poor Jenny is so plain."

Now, the widow's name is Jenny, an' it strikes me sort of queer  
That my thoughts should be upon her when that robin's song I  
hear.

She ain't so homely neither; but she never could compare  
With a certain bonzer vision with the sunlight in her hair.

When I wander down that evenin', she come smilin' to the gate,  
An' her look is calculatin', as she scolds because I'm late.

She takes my hat an' sits me down an' heaves a little sigh.  
But I get a queer sensation from that glimmer in her eye.

She starts to talk about the mill, an' then about the strike,  
An' then she digs Ben Murray up an' treats him nasty-like;  
She treats him crool an' cattish, as them soft, sweet women can.  
But I ups an' tells her plainly that I think Ben is a man.

First round to me. But she comes back, an' says Ben is a cad  
Who's made a laughin'-stock of her, an' treated her reel bad.  
I twig she's out for sympathy; so counters that, an' says  
That Ben's a broken-hearted man about the mill these days.

The second round to me on points; an' I was havin' hopes.  
(I might have known that widows were familiar with the ropes.)  
"But he'd *never* make a husband!" says the widow, with a sigh.  
An' again I gets a warnin' from that glimmer in her eye.



I says I ain't no judge of that; an' treats it with a laugh.  
But she keeps the talk on husbands for a minute an' a half.  
I can't do much but spar a bit, an' keep her out of range;  
So the third round is the widow's; an' the fight takes on a  
change.

I'm longin' for a breather, for I've done my nerve a lot,  
When suddenly she starts on "Love," an' makes the pace reel hot.  
In half a jiff she has me on the ropes, an' breathin' hard,  
With not a fight inside me—I can only duck an' guard.

She uppercuts me with a sigh, an' jabs me with a glance.  
(When a widow is the fighter, has a single bloke a chance?)  
Her short-arm blows are amorous, most lovin' is her lunge;  
Until it's just a touch an' go I don't throw up the sponge.

I use my head-piece here a bit to wriggle from the fix;  
For the widow is a winner 'less I fluke a win by tricks.  
An' I gets a reel mean notion (that I don't seek to excuse),  
When I interrupts her rudely with, "But have you heard the  
news?"

Now, to a woman, that's a lead dead certain of a score,  
An' a question that the keenest is unable to ignore.  
An' good old Curiosity comes in to second me,  
As I saw her struggle hopeless, an' "What news is that?"  
says she.

An' here I spins a lovely yarn, a gloomy, hard-luck tale  
Of how I've done my money in, an' I'm about to fail,  
How my house an' land is mortgaged, how I've muddled my  
affairs  
Through foolin' round with racin' bets an' rotten minin' shares.

I saw the fight was easy mine the minute I begun;  
An', after half a dozen words, the time-keep counted "One."  
An' when I finish that sad tale there ain't the slightest doubt  
I am winner of the contest, an' the widow's down an' out.

But not for long. Although she's lost, the widow is dead game:  
"I'm sorry, Mister Jim," says she, "for both your loss an' shame.  
All things is changed between us now, of course; the past is  
dead.  
An' what you were about to say you please will leave unsaid."

I was thinkin' in the evenin' over how I had escaped,  
An' how the widow took it all—the way she stared an' gaped.  
She looked her plainest at that time; but that don't matter  
now;  
For, plain or fair, I know of one who's fairer, anyhow.

I tells meself that beauty ain't a thing to count with man,  
An' I would never choose a wife on that unthinkin' plan.  
No robin was awake, I swear; but still I heard that strain:  
"Dear, it's a pity that poor Jenny is so plain."

## IX. MURRAY'S RIDE



## Murray's Ride

I SELDOM get to hatin' men, nor had much cause to hate;  
To me, it's just a foolish game to play, at any rate.  
But it kills the hard thought in you, an' forgiveness is complete,  
To see the man you hated once a maimed thing at your feet.

We'd had a meetin' at the mill; the boss had said his say—  
The good old boss, who stints himself to find the men their pay—  
He told us, fair an' honest, he was up against the game  
Unless he got the timber out before the Winter came.

I'll say this much for decent men—an' decent men they were—  
They saw the game that Murray played to give the boss a scare.  
We saw he'd pay near anything and Ben would do him brown;  
But a fair thing is a fair thing; so we turned Ben Murray  
down.

A truck was waitin' in the yard, full-loaded for the trip.  
Just an easin' of the brake-rope was enough to let her rip  
For half a mile or more down-hill along a track, rough-made,  
To where the horses wait to haul her up the other grade.

The talk was done, the numbers up, the boss had won the day,  
An' we were ready to get back an' earn our bit of pay;

When Murray, in a mad black rage, goes on to rave an' shout.  
"You're sacked," the old man tells him plain. "I've had  
enough. Get out!"

For close on half a minute I expected Hell to pay;  
But Murray glares around the mill—then turns an' walks away.  
He stops beside the loaded truck; an' each man in the mill  
Watched Murray with a sidelong look; an' each man wished  
him ill.

I knew Ben Murray for a gab; I knew him for a fool—  
A decent man enough at heart when he was calm an' cool—  
Wild rage had hold on him that day, an', maybe, madness too;  
An' scorn in me changed to dismay at what I saw him do.

He sprang behind the timber load an' leaped up at the back;  
He loosed the rope to start the truck upon the down-hill track;  
An' if he meant to jump or stay no man will ever know.  
"If I go out," Ben Murray yelled, "this is the way I go!"

"Stop that mad fool!" howled old man Blair. "He'll wreck the  
track below!"  
But now the truck had gathered way, an', as we watched her go,  
Ben Murray, with the brake-rope slack, cursed us with all his  
might.

She took the curve behind the huts, an' then went out of sight.

. . . . .



We found him near the wattle-clump, down in the little creek.  
His head was by a coral fern, an' blood was on his cheek,  
An' blood was on the wooden rails, an' he lay very still,  
The man who half an hour ago had meant to boss the mill!

"He's livin' yet" says old man Blair. "Boys, we must do our best.

Lay hold there, Jim, an' you, young Dick, an' heave that off his chest.

Man, but he's crushed! The crazy fool! Now treat him gently, lad."

"The track ain't damaged much," says Pike; "but, gosh, *he's* got it bad!"

. . . . .

Red stains were on the wooden track an' on the sunlit ground;  
A wagtail twittered by the creek, an' hopped an' fussed around;  
The Laughin' Jacks were wild with mirth; but very still he lay,  
As we took poor Ben Murray up an' carried him away.



## X. THE REAPER IN THE BUSH



## The Reaper in the Bush

**H**E was lyin' on his bunk,  
In the hut behind the mill,  
Ravin' like a man wild drunk,  
Never silent, never still.  
"Best go in an' say Good bye,"  
Says old Blair. "He's got to die."

God! I never want to see  
Any face so wrung with pain,  
Nor to hear such blasphemy  
Ever in my life again.  
White he was, an' starey-eyed,  
With his hand pressed to his side.

"Now he raves," says Daddy Pike.  
"He ain't wise to what he says.  
Never have I heard the like  
All me wicked livin' days."  
"Raise him up a bit," says Blair.  
"Put that pillow under there.

## JIM OF THE HILLS

"Raise him. . . . There now, easy, lad.  
Turn a little—gently—so.  
You'll not feel it near so bad. . . .  
Painin'? Yes, I know, I know.  
Yes, old man; it's Blair, your friend. . . .  
(Boys, he's very near the end.)"

Soon a saner, calmer look  
Came in Murray's strainin' eyes.  
Though his body heaved an' shook,  
He held back his awful cries  
Till another wave of pain  
Gripped him, an' he shrieked again.

"Christ!" he called. "O, Christ, the pain!  
Boys, you know I ain't a funk."  
Still he took the Name in vain,  
Writhin' there upon his bunk.  
"Do you call Him?" says old Blair,  
Pointin' upward. "He is there."

"Blair!" he gasps. "Do you believe?  
Such as me! Is there a chance?"  
"Easy, Murray. Don't you grieve.  
You ain't worth one single glance  
Save of pity from His eye.  
Laddie, pray before you die."



"God! I'm frightened, Blair!" says he . . .

"Boys, you know I never whined. . . .

Where's the hope for one like me?

I ain't no hymn-singin' kind."

There was pleadin' in his glance:

"Blair," he says, "is there a chance?"

Old Bob Blair reached for his hand.

"Chance there is, an' certainty.

Try to think an' understand.

Nothin's There to fear," says he.

"Him, the Merciful, the Mild,

Think ye He would strike a child?

"Think ye that He put you here,

Gave you labour, gave you pain,

So your end should be a fear

That you plead to Him in vain?

Nay, dear laddie, while you've breath,

Live in hope, an' smile on death."

With a hard hand, woman-kind,

He pushed back the sweaty hair.

"Now then, laddie, ease your mind,

Pain will end for you out There. . . ."

An' the smile on Blair's rough face

Was a blessin' an' a grace.

## JIM OF THE HILLS

"God!" says Ben, "You are a friend:  
Friend, old man, an' father too.  
Hold my hand right to the end—  
They'll take notice There of *you*. . . .  
Good-bye, Jim, an' Dusty Dick,  
Simon, Pike. . . . I'm goin'—quick."

With his eyes shut tight he lay,  
His breath comin' in great sobs.  
An' his poor lips seemed to pray,  
As his hand held fast to Bob's. . . .  
Now his sobs an' prayin' cease.  
Says old Blair, "God give him peace!"

"Give him peace!" sighed old Bob Blair,  
As he rose beside the dead.  
But I caught his wistful stare,  
An' the muttered words he said:  
"God," he prayed—"if one there be—  
Give such faith an' peace to me."

## XI. FLAMES



## Flames

**I**T'S human nature for a bashful bloke  
To bottle up, an' hesitate, an' doubt  
Till grinnin' Fate plays him some low-down joke;  
Then, in excitement, he goes blurtin' out  
The tale his sane mind never would impart,  
So all the near-by world knows it by heart.

Good luck for me, the near-by world that day,  
When I ran sobbin' thro' the scorchin' fern,  
Held few to hear the foolish things I say:  
No one was there my secret thought to learn,  
As I went shoutin' down the mountain spur,  
Only the scared birds, an' the trees, an' Her.

In fancy, many men have been thro' Hell,  
Tortured by fear, when hope has almost died;  
But few have gone thro' that, an' fire as well  
To come on Heaven at the other side  
With just one angel in it, safe an' well—  
A cool, calm angel by the name of Nell.

## JIM OF THE HILLS

The day the fire came sweepin' down the hill,  
Lickin' the forest up like some mad beast,  
We had our work cut out to save the mill;  
An', when the wind swung round into the East,  
An' blew the roarin' flames along the spur,  
Straight for "The Height," I gets quick fear for Her.

Flat out I was with fightin' all day long—  
(We saved the mill-shed, but the huts were done)—  
When some bloke, weak with sprintin', comes along—  
(Comic, it seemed to me, the way he run)—  
Shoutin' that someone's missin' from "The Height,"  
An' all the forest at the back's alight.

I don't know what he thought, an' never cared,  
When I grabs at his coat, an' starts to yell.  
I only know that I was dreadful scared. . . .  
In half a minute more, I guessed 'twas Nell.  
He tells me when an' where they thought she went,  
An' of the useless searchers they had sent.

I never waits for more; but turned an' ran  
Straight for the spur, along the scorchin' track.  
Behind me, as I went, I hear some man—  
I think it's Pike—bawlin', "You fool! Come back!"  
What plan was in my mind I cannot tell;  
I only know I want to find my Nell.

Next thing I mind, I've left the track, an' turned  
    Into the blackened scrub—my eyes feel bad—  
Above my head the messmate trees still burned.  
    An' Lord, them awful fancies that I had!  
I seen her lyin' there—her face—her hair. . . .  
Why, even now, them thoughts give me a scare.

I stumble on. Against a red-hot butt  
    I burn my hand, but never even swear;  
But keep on sayin', "Make the splitter's hut,  
    The splitter's hut! Get to the clearin' there.  
She's at the splitter's hut; an' if she ain't . . ." .  
My heart turns over, an' I feel dead faint.

An', as I plug along, I hear some fool  
    Repeatin' words till they sound like a spell.  
"I'm goin' mad," I thinks. "Keep cool! Keep cool!"  
    But still that voice goes on: "My Nell! My Nell!"  
I whips round quick to see who he can be,  
This yappin' fool—then realize it's me.

They say I must have gone thro' blazin' ferns.  
    Perhaps I did; but I don't recollect.  
My mind was blank, but, judgin' by my burns,  
    There's somethin' got to me that took effect.  
But once, I know, I saw a flamin' tree  
Fall just behind; but that don't trouble me.



## JIM OF THE HILLS

I don't know how I reached the splitter's hut,  
I only saw the ragin' fire—an' Nell.  
My clòthes were torn, my face an' hands were cut,  
An' half a dozen times, at least, I fell.  
I burst into the clearin' . . . an' I look. . . .  
She's sittin' on a log there—*with a book!*

I seem to cross that clearin' in a stride,  
Still sobbin' like a kid: "My Nell! My Nell!"  
I was clean mad. But, as I reach her side,  
I sort of wake, an' give that song a spell.  
But, by her eyes, for all she seemed so cool,  
I know she must have heard, an' feel a fool.

"Why, Mister Jim? You do look hot," says she.  
(But still her eyes says oceans more than that).  
"Did you come all the way up here for me?"  
Coolness? I tell you straight, it knocked me flat.  
By rights, she should fall sobbin' in my arms;  
But no; there weren't no shrieks an' no alarms.

I pulls meself together with a jerk.  
"Oh, just a stroll," I says. "Don't mention it.  
The mill's half burnt, an' I am out of work;  
They missed you, so I looked around a bit."  
"Now, that *was* good of you," says she, reel bright.  
"Wasn't the bush-fire just a splendid sight?"

She looks me up an' down. "Wvny, Mister Jim,"

She says to me, "you do look hot, indeed.

If you go strollin' that way for a whim

Whatever would you do in case of need?"

That's what she said. But with her eyes she sent

More than her thanks; an' I was quite content.

I seen her home; or, rather, she seen me,

For I was weak, an' fumbled in my stride.

But, when we reached "The Height," I seen that she

Was just on breakin'; an' she went inside. . . .

I stumbles home. "Well, Jim, lad, anyway,"

I tells myself, "you've had a fine, full day."



## XII. GREY THRUSH



## Grey Thrush

**G**REY thrush was in the wattle tree, an', "Oh, you pretty dear!"

He says in his allurin' way; an' I remarks, "Hear, hear!  
That does me nicely for a start; but what do I say next?"  
But then the Jacks take up the song, an' I get very vexed.

The thrush was in the wattle tree, an' I was underneath.  
I'd put a clean white collar on, I'd picked a bunch of heath;  
For I was cleaned an' clobbered up to meet my Nell that day.  
But now my awful trouble comes: What is a man to say?

I mean to tell her all I've thought since first I saw her there,  
On the bark-heap by the mill-shed, with the sunlight in her hair.  
I mean to tell her all I've done an' what I'll do with life;  
An', when I've said all that an' more, I'll ask her for my wife.

I mean to tell her she's too good, by far, for such as me,  
An' how with lonely forest life she never may agree.  
I mean to tell her lots of things, an' be reel straight an' fine;  
And, after she's considered that, I'll ask her to be mine.

I don't suppose I've got much hope—a simple country yob.  
I'd like to have a word with Blair—He's wise, is good old Bob.

He's got such common sense an' that, he'd tip me what to say.  
But I'm not nervous, not a bit; I'll do it my own way. . . .

I seen her by the sassafras, the sun was on her hair;  
An' I don't know what come to me to see her standin' there.  
I never even lifts my hat, I never says "Good day"  
To her that should be treated in a reel respectful way.

I only know the girl I want is standin' smilin' there  
Right underneath the sassafras. I never thought I'd dare,  
But I holds out my arms to her, an' says, as I come near—  
Not one word of that speech of mine—but, "Oh, you pretty  
dear!"

It was enough. Lord save a man! It's simple if he knew,  
There's one way with a woman if she loves you good an' true.  
Next moment she is in my arms; an' me? I don't know where.  
If Heaven can compare with it I won't fret much up there.

"Why, Mister Jim," she says to me. "You're very bold," says  
she.

"Yes, miss," I says. Then she looks up—an' that's the end of  
me. . . .

"O man!" she cries. "O modest man, if you go on like this—"  
But I interrupt a lady, an' I do it with a kiss.



"Jim, do you know what heroes are?" says she, when I'd  
"behaved."

"Why, yes," says I. "They're blokes that save fair maids that  
won't be saved."

"You're mine," says she, an' smiles at me, "an' will be all  
my life—

That is, if it occurs to you to ask me for your wife."

. . . . .

Grey thrush is in the wattle tree when I get home that day—  
Back to my silent, lonely house—an' still he sings away.

There is no other voice about, no step upon the floor;

An' none to come an' welcome me as I get to the door.

Yet in the happy heart of me I play at make-believe:

I hear one singin' in the room where once I used to grieve;

I hear a light step on the path, an', as I reach the gate,

A happy voice, that makes me glad, tells me I'm awful late.

Now what's a man to think of that, an' what's a man to say,  
Who's been out workin' in the bush, tree-fallin', all the day?

An' how's a man to greet his wife, if she should meet him  
here?

But Grey Thrush in the wattle tree says, "Oh, you pretty  
dear!"

THE END

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